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U.S. Is 'Locked Into' Inferiority To Soviet Weapons, Nitze Says

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A prominent critic of strategic arms agreements with the Soviet Union charges that the United States is "locked into a position of inherent inferiority" to Soviet weapons and "we don't know how to get out of it."

Paul H. Nitze says the Carter administration is "in deep trouble" in efforts to achieve its main goals of reducing the vulnerability of the American nuclear deterrent and achieving rough equivalence with Soviet power in the current strategic arms limitations talks, SALT II.

Nitze's attack yesterday was the strongest challenge to the administration's SALT II efforts made publicly since a tentative outline for a new treaty was agreed upon with the Soviet Union in late September. There has been a rising tide of criticism of the efforts in Congress and in the Pentagon but no detailed examination of the still officially secret details comparable to Nitze's.

HIS ATTACK WAS launched from the most complete account yet made public of those details. The main points had already leaked out of the administration.

A former senior official at both the Pentagon and the State Department as well as a SALT I negotiator, Nitze has stayed well informed on strategic relations as a private citizen. Some administration sources have suggested that he is supplied with classified information by those inside the government who oppose SALT ating positions.

Nitze spoke at a news conference arranged by the Committee on the Present Danger. Founded last year with Nitze as a key member, the private committee argues for a stronger U.S. military posture to counter what it sees as a growing threat of Soviet military preponderance that might enable Moscow to dominate the world.

The United States lacks the negotiating leverage to seek strategic armaments equal to the Soviets in later negotiations, Nitze said. This is caused by restrictions now being accepted on future weapons' developments and a political reluctance here to push ahead with some weapons systems, he contended.

Nitze pointed out that what were supposed to be just interim arrangements in the 1972 SALT I treaty allowing the Soviet Union more and bigger intercontinental ballistic missiles than the United States would become permanent if the present tentative agreement on SALT II finally becomes a treaty. But the supposed American advantage in technology which made that imbalance justifiable in 1972 is disappearing.

By 1985 or possibly earlier Soviet missile warheads could have enough accuracy to destroy some 90 percent of U.S. land-based missiles in a first strike by less than half their missiles, Nitze contended. But, he said, the entire U.S. land-based missile force would be able to destroy only 60 percent of the Soviet force.

U.S. STRATEGISTS have argued that the large force of American submarine-launched missiles provides more nearly equal balance, although those missiles cannot be targeted with as great accuracy as land-based ones. Nitze said the tentative agreement would leave the Soviets with an advantage in naval missiles also.

Most of his argument dealt with numbers and nuclear destructive power of land-based missiles, in which the Soviets have long had a lead. Nitze and other leaders of his committee reject the contention by some administration spokesmen that all this country needs is sufficient power to inflict unacceptable damage to the Soviet Union, which requires smaller numbers or power than equivalency.

The negotiations now under way in Geneva to try to work out details of the tentative agreement are reportedly having trouble with definitions of terms that are critical to the value of a treaty. There are also troubles in agreeing on ways to verify adherence to a new treaty.

Nitze was one of those who tried to make a public issue of contentions that the Soviet cheated on SALT I. With Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger playing the key role, however, the Ford administration bottled up that controversy.

Nitze said yesterday some of the current problems are defining how heavy a bomber has to be before it comes under strategic limitations, how the range of cruise missiles is calculated for treaty purposes, how big is a "small" missile, and similar points.

"Even were the limitations clearly defined," Nitze said, "compliance is in many cases difficult to verify." Cruise missile ranges, similarities in strategic and medium-range missiles, and other points could provide room for uncertainties.

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